



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff **Scott Mittelstadt** Chief Deputy

May Sheriff's Column – Thank you for the Gratitude

Recently, I was on patrol and I stopped at a local restaurant to get a meal. As I was about to pay, the employee said "You know your meals are free right now, right?". I smiled and said, "I know, but I am getting a paycheck while so many others are not. I appreciate the gesture but I need to pay for my meal. Feel free to give my free meal to someone who really needs it."

For those of us who have been deemed "essential" employees it can be easy for us to forget how fortunate we have been. Our income has not suffered and we can afford to pay the bills.

In addition, law enforcement has been dealing with an ethical dilemma for years. That dilemma being, should we accept free or discounted things (gratuities) simply because we are public servants? For example, a gas station or restaurant offering a free cup of coffee or soda when we stop in or a discount on a meal or merchandise that you might be purchasing.

The sheriff's office policy is that we will not accept gratuities that benefit the individual. Certainly donations that benefit the community as a whole, and not an individual deputy, such as donations to the K9 unit or other fundraisers for agency equipment is less problematic as those benefit the public. If we accept personal gratuities, it could be perceived that a deputy will provide preferential treatment for that person or business which is never ok. Even if there is no expectation of preferential treatment, the perception is there and others might view it that way.

Our community is extremely gracious. People drop off food or gift cards for individual deputies frequently because of great work they do. When these are received we often struggle with how to best handle the gifts. A gift card might be used to purchase fuel for a squad car instead. Cash donations will be put into our K9 fund or another fund used for public good. To be clear, it isn't that we don't appreciate the offer. We do really appreciate that our community cares and supports us. We just need to make sure we are doing the right thing ensuring that there is not a perception that we might make a favorable law enforcement decision to someone because of a free meal that was received.

The sheriff's office always strives to serve the public through honest, ethical and professional service to the community and the paycheck we receive is more than enough as compensation. Of course we will never turn down a thank you or kind words.

In the last couple of weeks, the sheriff's office has received offers from local restaurants. Sunview Restaurant and White Construction from Beaver Dam and Little Caesar's Pizza in Watertown have all offered to buy the sheriff's office lunch over the last week. I have explained to them that we truly appreciate their generosity and politely asked that we redistribute those donations to others in our community who really need them. All three businesses happily

agreed and we will be working to distribute those meals. Last Thursday, I responded to a house fire in which a family lost their home. That family will be one recipient of some of those meals, as they truly need the support right now.

For those out there who would like to donate food to thank the sheriff's office, we truly appreciate the gesture. However, I would ask that you make that donation to someone or to an organization that could really use the goodwill. It is our great honor to work for the citizens of Dodge County and the thanks we receive truly means a lot to us. The gratitude of our citizens is one more reason why Dodge County is such a great place to live, work and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt